

INTERVIEW WITH ALFRED GODIN
BY THOMAS GOETTEL NOVEMBER 12,1999

MR. GOETTEL: It's November 12, 1999 and we are in Al Godin's house in Leominster, Massachusetts. I am Tom Goettel from the Regional office in Hadley, Massachusetts. We have had a little trouble with the tape recorder here, so we are going to try this from step one. Al, I know that your are a Korean War veteran, and you were in the Navy. What ship were you on?

MR. GODIN: Yes. In Korean I was on the Princeton. That is a CV type Aircraft Carrier. It was an Essex class, World War II, carrier.

MR. GOETTEL: And you got out on the Navy in 1956?

MR. GODIN: No. Well, maybe it was close to 1956. The reason I left the Navy was that I had the opportunity to go to school under the GI Bill. Under this program the government paid for tuition and books and various lab fees plus seventy-five dollars a month for subsistence. I staid there for four years, and graduated with a BS, and subsequently went to work with Louisiana Fish and Wildlife as a Fishery Biologist. But my desire, or my love was in wildlife management. From there in Louisiana, I went to school and got my Master's at the University of Massachusetts, and then went to work with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a Fishery Biologist in Sandy Hook, New Jersey.

MR. GOETTEL: What did you do at Sandy Hook?

MR. GODIN: As a Fishery Biologist I did mostly survey work, asking fisherman what kind of lures they were using for sport fishing. We had to be able to visualize the type of lure that he described, and ask him how many hours that he worked or fished for different types of fish. It was mainly survey type work.

MR. GOETTEL: What is salt water or fresh water fishing, or both?

MR. GODIN: Only salt water, along the Atlantic coast. I wanted to go into wildlife, and from there, I transferred to Denver Wildlife Research Center doing bio-essay work. This involved testing chemical candidates to learn the feasibility of control [unintelligible] for certain small animals like [Latin name-sounds like Microbial specie] that caused problems for or the destruction of crops and agricultural things like shrubs and trees and things like that. Then I transferred to Patuxent Wildlife Research in Migratory Bird Population Station. There I was working with the [unintelligible]. We went to four areas in the country to determine the size and the composition of the bird species by age and sex. We also work on the criteria of determining the age of Canada Geese by the examination of tail feathers. From there I went to work for the Division of Wildlife Services in Region 5. My station was New Jersey, Delaware and Long Island, NY. I focused mainly on the problems of, and hazards caused by bird populations at airports. Most of my time was spent in New Jersey with the airport work. The other problem that

we had in New Jersey with the environment was a Canada goose problem. We studied these so called non-migratory geese, because they were born and staid all of their lives in the northeast area. They caused problems on golf courses and in a few other areas. Some of them were called “pests” because of the amount of droppings found on people’s lawns and places like that. Then they were the government’s problem. But when they were cute, they belonged to the people. That was a management problem. Southern states wanted these birds to reintroduce them to the southern states where this species of bird migrated to for the winter. It appears that the northeast was a stopgap that stopped the population. The population has grown to where they are now considered to be pests. They also caused problems at airports because of their large size, and sometimes their numbers. They might land on an airport during migration, or moving back and forth from a feeding area to a roost site. That is just a quick sketch of the Canada goose problem.

MR. GOETTEL: You became a fairly well known authority on bird-aircraft strike problems didn’t you? It seemed like you were going all over the place, at one point in time, on consultations and F.A.A. sponsored trips. Tell me a little about that. I know that you have worked in Alaska on Bald Eagles and Canada Geese.

MR. GODIN: The three trips to Alaska were funded by the F.A.A. because they had different problems up there. At Anchorage International Airport they had a problem with the Canada Geese. These were birds that were being hunted along the river and they would seek the airport as a refuge. They were not really conditioned to the aircraft traffic so they had some aircraft collisions. There was one instance where a People’s Republic of China aircraft stuck Geese and caused a problem with the aircraft, so they had to abort the aircraft and repair it. This was shortly after the time that President Nixon reestablished the cooperation and good friendship with the Chinese. That was one of the problems up there. Other, southern airports had problems with Bald Eagles perching in trees. What these birds would do was watch and wait for the Salmon migration. Then they would fly from the trees to pick up fish. Sometimes they would cross an airport runway where an aircraft would be approaching or departing. The problem there was rather easy to solve.

MR. GOETTEL: How did you solve it there?

MR. GODIN: Well, the birds were using the trees for perching and making their observations. So I recommended that we remove the trees. It was a simple thing to do. Right there, the birds needed some place to look down from for the fish, if you don’t provide them with that, they will go elsewhere.

MR. GOETTEL: How about the Canada Geese? What did you recommend for them?

MR. GODIN: With the Canada Geese the problem was the gulls on the runway, and the tarmac. Some of the information that I gave them was this so called “food, water and shelter” which are the three attractions to many animals that inhabit or use an airport for a short time. It was decided to use the shell crackers. This was to find the birds, but also,

whoever is going to be shooting shell crackers would do it alone. And they used certain automobiles to educate the birds that “here comes this automobile that is going to bother us”. Sometimes, when the problem is really serious, we had to provide the airport with a Federal Depredation permit. This regulates how many birds can be taken and so forth. It is not a permit to have a good time and kill geese.

MR. GOETTEL: I know that at J.F.K., and at Newark you worked on Gull problems that they had there? Tell me a little about that. What did you do there?

MR. GODIN: These airports like LaGuardia, Kennedy and Newark were located on the shores of the Atlantic coast on marginal land. At one time the cities had to have a place to dump their garbage. They dumped it on these marginal land areas, and then created airports. So these two entities were real close together. The dumps attracted the birds for feeding, and then they would use the airport for resting, and digesting their food. They would be moving back and forth, and in doing so they caused a hazard to the aircraft on takeoff and landing. We provided techniques to these airports on how to control the birds, mainly by non-lethal methods. If that didn’t work, then they could use lethal measures according to what was written in the permit. The permit never said that they could go out and kill birds. It’s up to the airport management or the operations department instructions. So that’s where I came in and provided workshops for the people in Operations, and involved in controlling the birds. It was like, “Do this, and don’t do that”, and so forth. Periodically, I would go out with some of these Operations people and I would examine what they were doing, and if they were doing it right.

MR. GOETTEL: You were in New Jersey, I know, for sixteen years, down in Trenton, New Jersey. It seems that during that period in time Canada Geese went from being a real attractive or desirable species to being a pest species. That is a real tragedy to see something like that happen isn’t it?

MR. GODIN: Yeah. The problem there started there, I think in the 1920s. Originally the birds, and when I say ‘birds’, I am talking about Canada Geese, they flew down on their migration from some place in the Hudson Bay, or Jane’s Bay, using the Atlantic Flyway. They went as far south as southern Florida. Some of them went to Texas and down in that area. That was the way it was for a long, long time. Then man came along and started building communities, and this and that. They have nice, green beautiful lawns and all of that “pretty” crap. I shouldn’t be talking like that. This attracted the birds to their lawns and golf courses and things like that. In addition, you could not hunt the birds and in some places in New Jersey, you can’t even hunt in a Township. Their excuse is, “No discharge of firearms”. So the birds can sense, in a way, that they are not being harmed and so that’s where they stay. It’s like survival for anybody. You’re not going in an area that might cause you a lot of harm. You stay away from it. Some of the southern states wanted these “nuisance” Canada Geese, that’s what we used to call them. I don’t know what they call them now. But they used to come up for the Round Ups. These occurred in the middle of June, usually during the third week of June. This was the time when adults molted their primary feathers, and the young birds or goslings were growing their primaries [feathers]. So the birds were unable to fly at that time. We went

to several places where there were large numbers of these geese, and the southern states took these birds to their states in order to provide the birds a “nitch” where there used to be hunted. I don’t want to say “hunting” but mainly that was all.

MR. GOETTEL: Now, I know that you are a native of Fitchburg, Massachusetts which is the next town over, from where we are now. And that you have had a life long interest in New England, and one of the things that I don’t think a lot of people in the Fish and Wildlife Service know, is that you’re the author and illustrator of The Wild Mammals of New England book which is to me an incredible book, because not only is it illustrated in pencil sketches of all of the mammals of New England, but it also has a lot of natural history and biographical information about them. I guess “biographical” is the wrong word, but it has a lot of information on the animals habits and food and so on. How did you get involved in taking a project like that on? That’s quite a project, to do something like that.

MR GODIN: I am always interested in wildlife. I was always that way. I found out that there was not much literature on the wild mammals of New England. Some of the things that were out there were special reports, but there was not one book that would indicate what the mammals were, and about their distribution, or lives, or habitat and where they were found and all of that. So this was mainly to impart the knowledge of some of these animals that occurred in New England. It took a long time. Mainly this book is a compilation of other people’s work. And that is sited in the book anyway. But my main contribution was that I examined about twenty-two thousand specimen of mammals that are found in museums. To site a few: I went to the National Natural History Museum in Washington, D.C. and looked at all of those mammals that were from New England. I plotted these on maps, as far as their distribution. I got the measurements and weights of these. And I went up as far north as Orono, Maine and looked at the species there they had in the museum. I looked at all of the states in between as well. That is my main contribution; where they were found at that time, and mainly which counties and the numbers that were taken. One thing that I really learned from this was the marine mammals such as Whales and Seals that occur along the coast of New England. Some of them would become stranded on land. So I have information on those. I some information from the New Bedford Whaling Museum, and again, the National Natural History Museum in Washington, D.C. and elsewhere.

MR. GOETTEL: That is an absolutely remarkable book, and I hope that it is in every National Wildlife Refuge office in the northeast anyway, because it’s just a beautiful, beautiful book.

MR. GODIN: Yeah, I mean, my focus and mission about was to impart knowledge, and tell the people that we have wild animals and they are here for us too, and so forth. So we shouldn’t go out and indiscriminately kill them. The press asked me, after the book came out, to write an update, and a new book. I couldn’t it because I was getting too old, and it’s like “backtracking”. You know, you do something, and then move on. One of the things that I moved on to was; my age was catching up to me and it was time to retire. But all in all, I had a great time with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and if I had to do it again, I would do it.

MR. GOETTEL: You were talking about ten years ago, at age sixty-two.

MR. GODIN: [joking] No, that was fifty-two! *You work that out!*

MR. GOETTEL: O. K., age thirty-two!

MR. GODIN: Yeah, I like that one! That's better!

MR. GOETTEL: Tell us what you got into then. How you spent your retirement years.

MR. GODIN: Believe it or not, Whales. I got fascinated with Whales when I wrote the book, Wild Mammals of New England. I saw that these animals were found along the coast, always migrating and moving along the coast, and some of them became stranded. So they were mammals of New England. And it's mainly because they are gentle animals, they don't go out and kill anybody, or attack this and that. That's a lot of bullshit, about the Moby Dick thing. I just liked the Whales, and that was my introduction to them when I was writing the book. And after I retired, I still loved wildlife and I decided; don't be offended, Fish and Wildlife Service, but I think I had enough about the birds and decided to go for the Whales, and try something new. The Whales are closely related to me because they are Mammals. And sometimes, I might look like a Whale. What I have been doing was researching anything I could find about the different species of the large Whales, especially those that are endangered. I kept doing research about it, and I met a lot of people who are also researching Whales, and they helped me out a lot. I have a couple that I have done in bronze.

MR. GOETTEL: So you have spent the last ten years or so, or almost ten years sculpting Whales. I know that we have gone through the process here today about how you about it. It's quite an involved process, how you go from the raw clay to the finished bronze. This tape will eventually end up in our Archives at our National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. Maybe at some point in time you could have a display there of some of your sculptures. [Stumbled on the word sculptures]
I am starting to talk like you, after all afternoon here! [Joking]

MR. GODIN: It's *that* good?

MR. GOETTEL: They are absolutely beautiful. They are incredible! You think that

the Whale is sitting right there in your living room. I am looking at a Sperm Whale and Blue Whale. I've never seen a Sperm Whale. I have been fortunate enough to see Blue Whales, and Humpback, and some of the other ones. But these things are just incredibly accurate, and just absolutely beautiful works of art.

MR. GODIN: Well thanks!

MR. GOETTEL: I know that now you are working with the New Bedford Whaling Museum, where they are assembling a skeleton of the Blue Whale.

MR. GODIN: Yeah, it's a young Blue Whale that was stranded in Massachusetts. I think that the U. S. Department of Commerce has helped by funding, in addition to the New Bedford Whaling Museum. In that new wing, there will be a skeleton of a young Blue Whale that beached itself on the Massachusetts coast. The New Bedford Whaling Museum, when I brought my Blue Whale there, last night. One of my friends was giving a speech on Blue Whales. He has been researching Blue Whales for years, and he is well known about it. But as a result, when the Museum saw the sculpted Blue Whale they asked me if I would display it along with their Blue Whale skeleton, which may be on exhibition by July 4, 2000. I said it would be O.K. Mainly, it's because they want to show what a Blue Whale looks like with the skin on, compared to the skeleton. One thing leads to another, and it keeps me happy. Although I liked the Fish and Wildlife Service, I'm telling you now, *retirement is great!* [Laughing]

MR. GOETTEL: So, you've had a whole new career, I think since you retired almost. It's just incredible. What are some of your most memorable experiences in the Fish and Wildlife Service? When you look back, what do you think about?

MR. GODIN: I guess it's the airport work. I always liked to be at the airports. I had access, working with the Operations people. There would be times when my bosses, I had a lot of bosses, they would say, "I'd like to come down". And I would say, "Come on down". He would tell me what airport he would be coming in to, and on what flight. I always liked to be at the airport maybe an hour before he arrived. That way I would have a place to park, and all of that. But mainly it was to look at the people that are getting ready to fly, and people coming off of the aircraft. It's the human behavior about this that I enjoyed watching. And I would say to myself "Well, at least we've got a safe flight that came in". That led me to believe that I was going my part in preventing the birds from colliding with aircraft, with all of these happy people coming in. That, right there; if I had to do it all over again, I would do the airport thing, because of the public safety. That's about all.

There was some things that I didn't care too much about. The Fish and Wildlife Service. Especially some of the jobs, but overall, I am glad that I staid with the Service. It was a good place. And I met a lot of good people too, a lot of them. We had some good times, and we had some bad times but that goes with life.

MR. GOETTEL: I think that one of the tragedies about animal damage control, or wildlife assistance was when it went to the Department of Agriculture. And I say, tragedy, because we were all part of a family it seemed. We all worked very close together. Even though I was in Refuges, I was working with you guys all of the time it seemed. You guys were Field Biologists, and it's hard to get, fifteen years later, it's so hard to find good Field Biologists that have good, practical experience. Speaking for myself, I really hated to see that part of the Fish and Wildlife Service get transferred away. Because the fact of the matter is that we just didn't work that closely any more. I mean, we did, but it was a little bit different I think.

MR. GODIN: Yeah, that's right. Working as a biologist, whether a field biologist or an office biologist, we were really dedicated. I know that some people might think that is bullshit, but we were. And as you interview other people you will see how the puzzle fits together to have a nice organization. I had a good time. I hope that at least, I helped other people. Not only the birds or mammals or whatever, but it's the people.

MR. GOETTEL: After sixteen years in New Jersey you spent about six months in the Regional office, I guess, or four months in the Regional office. Then you transferred up to Augusta, Maine as the Wildlife Assistance Field Biologist-State Director in Maine.

MR. GODIN: One of the problems that I first heard about in Maine was about the Canada Geese and Blueberries. These are the low-bush Blueberries that occur in Maine. What the Canada Geese would do was just walk into the bush and eat the Blueberries. But as they were doing this, they would trample over the low bushes, and a lot of the berries fell off onto the ground. This would cause an economic hardship for the Blueberry growers. They phoned me and asked me what they could do. I said that they could use the shell crackers. And if it became evident that the problem was not improving, I would investigate it a little more, and make bird observations to see what they were really doing. That's how we solved the problem of Canada goose depredation of Blueberries, at least when I was there, just by using shell crackers. They were really worried about people, much more than Gulls would be.

MR. GOETTEL: You worked on Cormorants I think too, didn't you, up there?

MR. GODIN: Yes. One of the problems that the State Fish and Game had was the Atlantic salmon depredation with the Double Crested Cormorant. In Maine there is at least one Fish and Wildlife Service hatchery that grows these Atlantic salmon. They release them as smelt. This is up in the Penobscot River. Then the fish would migrate down to the ocean, and be on their way to return, and then, go back south. So, the Cormorant was causing depredation. They were eating a lot of the smelts. Nobody made an assessment of how much that the birds were eating, or if it was a natural mortality of the fish, or if the birds were taking more of these fishes. What we did when we were working the State Atlantic Salmon Commission and the State Fish and Game Commission was to work on the upper and lower Penobscot River, collecting the Starlings. We divided these into certain areas, like A, B, and C, and so forth. With the Cormorants that we got, we did crop seed, and stomach analyses, where a Fishery Biologist would examine and identify the fish that were inside of the gullets and stomachs of the Cormorants. One thing that we noticed was that we found that the female Cormorants did not go up [north] as far as the males were. So they were using the lower part of the river mainly to gather food and use this energy for raising broods. We believe that our contribution to solving this problem was to actually get the animals and find out what they were feeding on. This here was part of a larger study conducted by I believe the U. S. Fish and Wildlife, Research Unit located in Orono, Maine. I believe that they have a publication on that, because about a year or a year and a half ago, I received a draft of it. They wanted my to give my input as to what we did and so forth.

That worked out pretty well, but there is a findings and final report on that problem. That there was our contribution to solving that problem.

MR. GOETTEL: I remember that you worked on Eiders too. There was Eider depredation on Mussel farms?

MR. GODIN: Yeah. This was a problem with the Common Eider. The birds would feed on the smaller Mussels. Some of them would feed on larger, or in between sized Mussels. The people that ran the farms were issued a Depredation permit so that they could take the birds with shotguns. It was a very restrictive type of permit. The number of birds they could take was really low. Each one of these birds that were taken by the aquacologists, I guess. I went and I observed the crop seeding work that they were doing and so forth, and made sure that they were doing it the right way. I also checked to see that the data that they got was correct. That was a problem. I have been out of the Fish and Wildlife Service a long time, and I don't know what the problem is up there now. They also had the problem of birds hazarding aircraft mainly at the Portland Airport, which is the largest airport, I think, in Maine, other than the military one which was Peese, and that one is closed. I met with the airport Manager several times, and provided them with workshops. We went out in the field with the shell crackers and learned how to move birds away from the aircraft.

MR. GOETTEL: Were there mainly Gulls there?

MR. GODIN: Yes, there were mainly Gulls. There were no Starling roosts or anything like that. In that area, they were using the cities. That was mainly because there were no evergreens at the airport. There was no attraction for the Starlings there.

MR. GOETTEL: When you have a Starling problem, what do you do? What would you recommend to the airports where you had serious Starling problems?

MR. GODIN: The problem there is that the Starlings are using whatever is on the airport for roosts. They are not there to eat, or anything like that. There are a lot of airports that I noticed that had this fancy landscaping to make the airport look pretty. It was these evergreens that the Starlings liked because there are green throughout the year. The birds would get so used to it, they would know when to fly from a staging area right onto the roosting area, right about sundown or when the sun begins to set. This varies from day to day, from a clear sky to a cloudy sky. At some airports, especially at Kennedy, I noticed that the Starlings would somehow fly in between aircraft. An aircraft approaching for a landing at Kennedy, the other aircraft following it is just about three miles away. The birds sensed that one the land had landed, and the other plane is about three miles away, they could fly safely in their roosts. The way to control that was to eliminate the tress. The guess that is a bitter pill, but it was the only way to solve the problem. Because you are providing the birds with a place to perch and that comes under shelter. You know, "food-water-shelter". If you take one of those things away, you are going to die, or you're going to have to go someplace else where you can get all three. So these were some of the things we did. Some of the problems were easy to solve, some

of them took a while to solve. Most of the work in the field, I think, is using common sense, plus the knowledge that you got from school and the books. If you combine the two, and you will come out pretty good, and if you don't know how to do that then you will have a nice job in an office.

MR. GOETTEL: Present company, excluded. Right?

MR. GODIN: Yeah!

MR. GOETTEL: Let's see, we've been talking for quite a while. Would you rather continue this at another day? It sounds like you are getting kind of dried out here.

MR. GODIN: Yeah, I am getting tired.

MR. GOETTEL: Why don't we do that? Why don't we stop for November 12th, and we'll pick this up on another day?

[No conversation on side B of cassette]